

Maundy Thursday Fr. Hugh St. George
"Thy will be done".

Maundy Thursday is an extremely important date to remember. It is good that you are here, because it is one of the most important times of the year to receive Holy Communion, as we commemorate the anniversary of our Lord's Last Supper.

It was the night He gave His new commandment "love one another as I have loved you."

The night that He was betrayed and arrested.

The night that He agonized in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Knowing that it would be their last evening with Him, He had used the time to tell His disciples many important things that He wanted them to know.

When the supper was finished He went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives to pray.

He was confronting a critical life and death decision. The irony was that what looked like the choice for life would have been the choice for death; and what looked like the choice to face death was in fact the choice for eternal life.

He struggled in prayer over whether to go ahead with this death by crucifixion that had been pre-ordained for him. Or, whether to use His divine powers to avoid this horrendous thing. For a moment His personal feelings of trepidation and the will of God the Father did not seem to be aligned. What should He do?

He poured out his heart passionately as He wrestled in dialogue with His Father.

He was feeling deeply disappointed that His disciples, His friends, could not even stay awake with Him and pray with Him at His time of need. He woke them up, none too gently I imagine, telling them to pray not to fall into temptation - a prayer we should never forget.

Jesus taught that whatever believers prayed for in His Name would be granted. But in this prayer He added an extraordinary formidable proviso. He said if His request was not in accord with His Father God's will, that God's Will must take precedence. He prayed,

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me. Yet not my will but Thy will be done."

He prayed for a long time, seeking to be reassured as to what was right for Him to do, and He became clear again that He had to undergo the betrayal, the trials and the torture to death on the Cross.

It's important that we understand that Jesus had a choice. As a man, he felt fear and trepidation about what He was about to endure. And He chose to go through with it, knowing that this was the plan, the only plan for the salvation of the human race.

Jesus chose to be obedient and make the ultimate sacrifice. He had taught a lot about Love, and that the greatest act of love was to give your life for your friends; and there He was, right at the point of making that supreme demonstration of love.

It is human nature to want to do our own will. It is contrary to human nature to seek to do God's will. But to follow our own will, when it flies in the face of God is nothing short of directly rebelling against God.

To rebel against God is to rebel against life itself.

God's way has always been to allow people to make their own choices – to let people go their own way, until they realize the obvious truth that rejecting God, rejecting Life, can only lead to self-destruction.

Ultimately, everyone will fall into one of two groups. We all have the choice. You are either someone who says to God, "Your will be done!"

Or, you are someone to whom God will finally have to say: "OK. If that's what you choose - Your will be done."

Where men and women have always been inclined to say 'No' to doing God's will, Jesus set the new standard of faithful obedience with a clear affirmative, "Yes. Thy will be done."

Although He had never sinned He said, "Yes. I will accept the divine judgment that the sinful human race has brought upon itself."

This prayer of Jesus and the example of His actions has been a driving inspiration to innumerable Christians throughout the centuries. Still today Christians in countries hostile to the faith are willing to face persecution to be true to God's will.

There is also a simple associated question that people ask, "How do I know what God's will is for my life?"

Often, I hear people when they encounter a disaster, or a disappointment, say with a shrug of resignation, "Oh well. It's God's will I suppose."

But be clear that accepting God's will is not a matter of resigning ourselves in the face of difficulties. It is not a matter of giving in fatalistically to troubles or sickness. To think that way is to insult God by characterizing Him as uncaring.

How do we know what God's will is for us?

There are two sources for knowing God's will. The first is God's teaching in the Bible where God lays out His general will for everyone. That is why we repeatedly review the Ten Commandments during Lent, so we can have no excuse for pretending that we don't know His Will.

The second way to know God's will is prayer. Through prayer we can discern God's specific will for us personally.

Corrie Ten Boom, who was the senior General of the Salvation Army, used to ask people: "Do you use prayer as your steering wheel, or just as your spare tire?"

Often when we pray we are really saying: "Lord here's what I want. This is my will. Please bless it and make it happen."

This way of praying also insults God, by viewing Him as the beneficent cosmic slot machine into which we put our prayer and expect Him to deliver.

Then, and this is a big issue for a lot of people – we are reluctant to ask God's will in case it conflicts with our personal agenda.

So we feebly acquiesce to thinking: "If I don't really seek His will, I can get off the hook for not knowing it and so avoid doing anything too demanding."

But to seek God's will is absolutely an expectation that comes with the territory of being a Christian.

Many seminary students in their enthusiasm to go out into the world and serve God say things like, "Here I am Lord. Send me wherever you want." Then you hold your breath and hope that it isn't somewhere you really don't want to go to."

By the time they are older and tired, many clergy find themselves thinking, "Here I am Lord. Please send someone else."

An English Bishop once told me that when he was at seminary he told God that he would be happy to go and serve Him anywhere in the world, and added under his breath, 'except the Equator, the North Pole or Birmingham.'

A lot of Brits make jokes about Birmingham in the same way that Americans speak of Cleveland.

So his first church was in Uganda, on the Equator. His second church was in Alaska, not far from the North Pole. He finally ended up being the Bishop of Birmingham. Oh well.

How do we know what God's will is for us?

I do not believe that God has every moment of our lives planned out in pre-ordained detail that we follow like robots. He gave us free will and we continually face choices.

At certain points He may have specific directions for us, which we can only hear if we spend sufficient time in prayer. As Jesus said, "Could you not pray with me for one hour?"

Every day, if we really live according to His teaching, we are going to be following His will.

If we do His will it is always going to work out for the best in the long run, even though we don't see that in the short term. That is Faith - Following His ways when you cannot see how it's going to work out.

The dominant principle in Jesus' life was to do the will of His Father. May we also seek to know and do God's will.

Tonight, as we recall Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane is a very good time for each of us to say to God, quietly, sincerely:

"Not my will, but Thy will be done."